
IMPROVING PRONUNCIATION OF FRESHMEN THROUGH MOODLE-BASED ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Good pronunciation enhances both the intelligibility and the effectiveness of speech, so how to teach pronunciation has received great attention from teachers and researchers. Among a wide variety of methods, Moodle has emerged as an efficiently potential tool to assist students in acquiring an intelligible pronunciation. Pronunciation courses can be built on a Moodle site where teachers upload and share the designed materials with their students. Despite various advantages of Moodle courses, not many studies offered empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of Moodle projects on improving students' pronunciation in Vietnam's English as Foreign Language (EFL) context. Therefore, this study aimed to find out how using Moodle-based activity can improve freshmen's pronunciation. The project consisted of 62 Van Lang University freshmen (Vietnam), who were organized into two different groups: the control group and the experimental group. Mixed method was used in combination with various tools for data collection such as pre- and post-test, questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The data collected showed that there was a sharp improvement in the experimental group's pronunciation. In the hope of bettering students' pronunciation, some suggestions for optimizing Moodle-based activities are also mentioned at the end of this research paper.

Keywords: *Moodle courses, teaching pronunciation, e-learning, intelligible pronunciation, blended learning*

INTRODUCTION

In the trend of globalization and integration, English is a must that employers always require students to have. Therefore, universities

make great efforts to equip students with English communication skills, yet it is a hard task because of a large number of students and limited course duration.

According to Maniruzzaman (2008), pronunciation takes an integrated and integral role throughout second/foreign language learning process, as it significantly determined learners' communicative competence and performance. However, teaching pronunciation is not emphasized inside and outside the class for many reasons, for example, the lack of supporting tools, less chance of English practice (Fraser, 1999), very little chance in classrooms to teach pronunciation (Tahereen, 2015). Therefore, learners need computer-based pronunciation resources and teachers can use these resources as an important means of enhancing their teaching (Fraser, 2000).

In Vietnam context, due to the school syllabus, university students have limited time for pronunciation practice. Besides, multi-level learners with different learning pace and styles in large size classes also affect negatively the learners' performance. Therefore, Moodle -based activities are an ultimate solution to better students' pronunciation because Moodle has been proved to be useful for improving cooperation between Japanese students who use Praat and Ultrasound in the Pronunciation course (Brine, Wilson, & Roy, 2007), or support effectively Distant Learning System students in vocabulary and grammar as well as the 4 skills (Bošković, Gajić, & Tomić, 2014). The combination of Praat and the Choice activity in Moodle was also certified as efficient in providing measurements of the duration, pitch, and intensity of students' sound, pointing out each student's mistakes, and supporting the teacher to enhance the class time (Wilson, 2008). Furthermore, Moodle together with its diverse activities and resources is believed to support individual learning pathways (Pandey & Pandey, 2009) or cooperative learning (Wu, 2008, as cited in Suppasetserree & Dennis, 2010). Moodle is even an open source, which means that the code is freely available and easily accessible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is pronunciation?

According to Nunan (2003), pronunciation is the manner in which certain sounds are made in their speech by speakers of a language and understood by the hearer in order to understand each other. Maniruzzaman (2008) also added that pronunciation is seen as an integrated and central part of second / foreign language learning, as it

affects the communicative skills and performance of learners. Yates and Zielinski (2009), as cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) reconfirmed the definition of pronunciation: “Pronunciation is the way of producing the sounds that are used to make meaning when speakers speak” (p.967).

Gottlieb (2006), as cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) agreed with Nunan (2003) that the speaking/pronunciation part has been limited to only the drill or situational responsive answers. Among new approaches was to do real-world speaking activities with regard to one particular segmental or spelling, phrasing, rhythm, or tone aspect of pronunciation. Cook (2013) recommended several techniques for teaching and learning English pronunciation such as phonetic transcript, imitation, discrimination of sounds, and communication. Schmitt (2002) mentioned other ways to learn English pronunciation such as elicited mechanical development, sound contrast ear training, and meaning contrast sounds.

The importance of intelligible pronunciation acquisition in EFL

Intelligibility is defined as “how much of the speech is understood by interlocutors” (Munro, 2011, p.9). Kirkpatrick (2014) stated that intelligibility is an ideal goal for most learners because EFL learners cannot completely pronounce English words exactly like native speakers. Jenkins (2002) claimed that learners need to be intelligible to both native and non-native speakers.

Greenwood (2002), as cited in Al-Azzawi., & Barany (2016), modifies the idea of Kirkpatrick (2014) that learners are very unlikely to acquire a native-like accent, but their intelligibility can be greatly enhanced by efficient pronunciation teaching. He also highlights that the lack of control over vowels and consonants may lead to total communication breakdown.

Greenwood (2002), as cited in Al-Azzawi., & Barany (2016) indicated that people need to use English for social, educational and professional reasons, locally and internationally. Thus, it is essential for them to have a high level of intelligibility to communicate. This leads to revived urgency to the teaching of pronunciation.

Moreover, according to Thompson and Gaddes (2005), as cited in Al-Azzawi and Mohamed (2016), improving pronunciation can improve learners’ confidence and motivation. It is important to handle both sound and meaning in pursuing the students’ linguistic goals. By teaching phonological rules, teachers can facilitate students’

pronunciation learning by listening to their own speech and recognizing their own mistakes.

Problems in teaching pronunciation

In Vietnam context, the interference of the first language (L1), or Vietnamese, is considered the common problem of Vietnamese EFL students. For instance, Vietnamese language does not have consonant clusters or a glide from one consonant to another as in English affricates (Huynh Trang Nguyen & Dutta, 2017) and Vietnamese EFL students do not pronounce English final consonants clearly enough (Duong Thi Nu, 2009). Moreover, Vietnamese EFL students tend to mispronounce affricates (/tʃ/ and /dʒ/) or nasal (/ŋ/) (Do, 2017). Do's paper contributes significantly to raising the awareness of the importance of good pronunciation on learners' confidence, speaking competence, and sense of achievement (2017).

Likewise, Bangladesh teachers also deal with students' L1 interference in pronunciation teaching. The main difficulty that Bangla speakers face is to pronounce and differentiate between /ə/ and /ɜ:/ (Kenworthy, 1991, as cited in Tahereen, 2015). Besides, Bangladesh students also cope with another challenges in learning pronunciation, that is, little exposure to English. Only at tertiary level can students have access to lectures in English. As a result, perfect pronunciation at this time is rather hard to achieve. Lack of concern and awareness for pronunciation and influence of local accent are also main factors that cause difficulties for students in acquiring perfect pronunciation (Tahereen, 2015).

Hassan (2014) agreed with Tahereen (2015) that mother tongue interference is the challenge that face students in learning pronunciation. In addition, Hassan (2014) added several other problems such as the disparity between L1 and L2 and the sound systems between L1 and L2, English Vowels ambiguity.

What is Moodle and its prominence compared with previous traditional tools to teach pronunciation?

According to Suppasetserree & Dennis (2010), Moodle is one of the technology facilitators which is commonly used to transfer language teaching and learning. Moodle is an open-source software framework free of licensing, which includes e-learning. In the area of ESL and EFL, Moodle has gained much attention from a great number of teachers and professionals in their second and foreign language classes.

Moodle is a strong and diverse Learning Management System (LMS) in the context of course management in which administrators can completely monitor its functions. Student activities can be recorded in logs so teachers can check what students did on Moodle and teachers can accurately monitor the timelines for assignments, quizzes, forums, chatting. It also allows to choose various types of tests, such as fill-in, multiple choice, matching, true false, short answers (Cole, 2005).

Moodle promotes cooperation in learning with many useful resources such as wikis, forums, chats, blogs, and workshop, so teachers should complement their teaching with various forms of social networking and collaboration to communicate with each other (Wu, 2008).

With above functions, teachers can use Moodle as a tool for students to practice pronunciation. They can record their voice and upload in the forums, then the teachers and partners can give feedback. Besides, some pronunciation test can be designed and automatically marked with Moodle that helps to save time.

The benefits and challenges of Moodle-based activities, particularly on pronunciation

The benefits of Moodle-based activities in teaching and learning

Suppatsereee and Dennis (2010) reports that advantages of Moodle were categorized into four groups. Firstly, Moodle facilitates student-centered learning because the students will use the online resources to train themselves. Second, Moodle encourages learning wherever possible, which means students can study online based on their times of convenience. Thirdly, Moodle makes management of the courses simpler. In certain cases, Moodle is useful for teachers due to this feature. Teachers are provided with valuable functions for easy running of the course. Lastly, Moodle helps to reduce the expense and time of teaching, print paper because these resources are online and students can access websites without printing their work out (Suppatsereee & Dennis, 2010).

Along the same thread, Bošković, Gajić, & Tomić (2014) emphasized that Moodle offers a lot of benefits for online communication since its mobility, the extra time it takes to find potential answers, anonymity, no time zone limits, and cost -effectiveness. Benefiting from multimedia tools and applications like pictures, sounds, animations is also another strength of Moodle system to help students practice four language skills.

Challenges of using Moodle-based activities in teaching and learning

Technology problems, instructor problems and the effectiveness of Moodle are three key disadvantages of Moodle. For the first problem, the stability of the network was announced as the main obstacle of the Moodle system. The problem with instructor is seen as Moodle's next difficulty among teachers because they need things such as training and time to master Moodle's functions. Moodle's features and choices make it impossible for teachers to use Moodle in terms of its effectiveness. Some functions of Moodle are claimed to be inappropriate for students (Suppasetserree & Dennis, 2010).

Beside the technical difficulties, confirmation of identity of students during online learning and the topic of error checking, providing appropriate feedback on errors made, are both on the Moodle disadvantages list. Additionally, online English language instruction for teachers lacks instructional content. When it comes to students' difficulties in using Moodle, fuzziness, limited chat, difficult -to - understand tasks, log-in problems or uninteresting contents are main challenges that students have to encounter (Bošković, Gajić, & Tomić, 2014).

Findings about the benefits of Moodle-based activities in teaching and learning pronunciation as well as in bettering students' pronunciation

In Thai context, Moodle encourages learning in a learner-centered way and anytime-anywhere learning. In addition, it simplifies course management and helps to reduce the expense and time of instruction delivery. Additionally, students were asked questions about using Moodle, and the results showed that they had optimistic views on learning English through Moodle (Suppasetserree & Dennis, 2010).

Moodle is used for coordinating individual as well as group activities at a Japanese computer science university. Examples of freeware and open-source software tools, such as CmapTools for concept mapping and Praat for acoustic analysis that can be used within Moodle to improve EFL reading, writing, and pronunciation courses, are presented. Moodle can be combined with software to create shared documents, such as Google Docs and Spreadsheets. Moodle can also be used as an action analysis tool, allowing the teacher / researcher to monitor the content of the course in two separate courses while testing theories about language learning in various aspects of the curriculum. (Wilson, 2008).

“Practice makes perfect”, goes an old saying. As opposed to traditional methods of teaching pronunciation, Moodle may give more activities and practice for students at home, which will sharpen students’ pronunciation better. In an offline classroom, there may be fewer opportunities for students to practice their pronunciation due to classroom sizes, time limit or students’ anxiety of public performance. Therefore, Moodle - based pronunciation activities may offer more time for student to rehearse online their pronunciation in less pressure conditions.

Despite a great number of advantages of Moodle in EFL classroom, little evidence has been found about the influence of using Moodle on students’ pronunciation. In order to bridge this gap, this research was conducted at Van Lang University, Vietnam. It aimed at answering the following specific research questions:

1. Is there a homogeneity in the pronunciation level between the control group and experimental group before Moodle -based activities are used?
2. Is there any progress in pronunciation in both experimental class and control class after the application of Moodle -based activities? What is the difference in the progress of both groups?
3. What aspects of pronunciation are improved after the application of Moodle -based activities?
4. How to optimize the pronunciation study through Moodle -based activities?

METHODOLOGY

The research method

The mixed method was used in this study because it is useful when either the quantitative or qualitative approach itself is insufficient to better understand the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this paper, pre-posttests, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview were used to collect data. The purpose of pre- and posttests is to see how students made progress through each pronunciation lesson with Moodle. In addition, the questionnaire showed their attitudes towards pronunciation improvement with Moodle. In order to make the results more persuasive, a semi - structured interview (six students) was conducted. In the interview, students could freely share their opinions.

Setting and participants

In this research, a total of 62 EFL undergraduate university students in different majors were selected to participate in the study. The participants were enrolled in two (2) different English classes in accordance with their scores from the English placement test from the university, which is a multiple-choice test including skills of mainly listening, grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The experimental group consisted of 32 students and the control group was comprised of 30 students.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were utilized in order to carry out this study: (1) pronunciation pre-test and pronunciation post-test, (2) questionnaire and (3) an interview guide.

1. The pronunciation pre-test and post-test were designed to measure the change of the students' pronunciation before and after applying the blended lessons. The students' pronunciation in the two tests was evaluated according to the V-step speaking scale. In order to ensure the reliability of the test scores, two markers, who discussed the rating issues and did the norming scoring beforehand, would grade a student's pronunciation test.
2. A questionnaire was given out to the students aiming to investigate the student's opinions on the Moodle-based pronunciation course. The questionnaire included 6 questions in a five-point scale (Likert Scale). 5 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree. Moreover, it also contained 03 open-ended questions so that the students could express their viewpoints in detail.
3. Furthermore, an interview with 05 students was carried out in the final week. From the students' answer, the researchers would have a deeper understanding of the students' points of view.

Data analysis techniques

After the data were collected, they were analyzed to present the results of this study.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data consist of the students' scores from the pronunciation pre-test, pronunciation post-test and questionnaire. With

the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software, Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare the pre-test result of the experiment class and control class. After that, Wilcoxon test was also used to check if there is any progress in pronunciation in both experimental class and control class. Next, the usage of Mann-Whitney U test was to compare the posttest scores of the experimental class and the control class. Finally, the Cohen's d and the effect-size correlation r were looked up to point out how much progress the experimental class has made in pronunciation in comparison with the control class.

In terms of questionnaire, the percentage of students for each statement was calculated to illustrate students' level of advancement in pronunciation.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The data collected by the interview would be analyzed by classifying them into themes. Besides, students' answers to open - ended questions (in the Questionnaire) were also categorized into themes to clarify the benefits students received after learning with Moodle activities.

The study design

In this study, the blended lessons on vowels and consonants were designed and based on the pronunciation book "Ship or Sheep" (Baker, 2006) for the duration of 12 weeks. The experimental group were instructed and guided the pronunciation lessons for 45 minutes in their weekly English class. And every week, students had to post their practice recording on the online forum in Moodle, where they can download the handouts and audio files as well as some pronunciation training videos for their further practice.

After posting their recording, the students had to listen and give comments on their two friends' recordings. The teacher would join the discussion on the forum as well as randomly give corrections for some students' recordings in class.

RESULTS

The result from Pre-test and Post-test: SPSS Analysis

After considering the normal distribution of Pre-test scores and Post-test scores of both classes, it is observed from Shapiro-Wilk table ($N < 50$) that neither pre -test sores nor post - score (of both experimental class and control class) has a normal distribution because all Sig.(2-tailed) < 0.05 as in the following table:

Table 1*Tests of Normality*

| | | Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|----------|------------|---------------------------------|----|------|--------------|----|------|
| Class | | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Pretest | Experiment | .233 | 32 | .000 | .876 | 32 | .002 |
| | Control | .190 | 30 | .007 | .873 | 30 | .002 |
| Posttest | Experiment | .205 | 32 | .002 | .886 | 32 | .003 |
| | Control | .224 | 30 | .000 | .867 | 30 | .001 |

Therefore, non-parametric test should be employed to measure the to measure the level of improvement in pronunciation between the two classes.

Table 2*Mann-Whitney U test to compare the pre-test result of the experiment class and control class*

| | | Ranks | | |
|---------|------------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Class | | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| Pretest | Experiment | 32 | 33.25 | 1064.00 |
| | Control | 30 | 29.63 | 889.00 |
| Total | | 62 | | |

| Test Statistics ^a | Pretest |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 424.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 889.000 |
| Z | -.821 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .411 |

To ensure the homogeneity of the two groups, the students did the pre-test. The result of the pre-test is illustrated as the above table. According to the result from the table, Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.411 > 0.05, H_0 fails to be rejected. It means that there had been a homogeneity in the pronunciation level between the control group and experimental group before Moodle -based activities were used.

Table 3

Wilcoxon test to check whether there is any progress in pronunciation in both experimental class and control class

| Experimental class | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Ranks | | | | |
| | | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| Posttest Pretest | - Negative Ranks | 1 ^a | 12.50 | 12.50 |
| | Positive Ranks | 26 ^b | 14.06 | 365.50 |
| | Ties | 5 ^c | | |
| | Total | 32 | | |

a. Posttest < Pretest

b. Posttest > Pretest

c. Posttest = Pretest

| Test Statistics | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Posttest - Pretest | |
| Z | -4.289 ^b |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

| Class | |
|------------|---------|
| Experiment | Control |
| | |

| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|----------|------|--------------------|------|--------------------|
| Pretest | 5.75 | .92 | 5.53 | 1.07 |
| Posttest | 6.73 | .76 | 5.94 | .96 |

Control class

| | | Ranks | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| | | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| Posttest - Pretest | Negative Ranks | 5 ^a | 9.90 | 49.50 |
| | Positive Ranks | 15 ^b | 10.70 | 160.50 |
| | Ties | 10 ^c | | |
| | Total | 30 | | |

a. Posttest < Pretest

b. Posttest > Pretest

c. Posttest = Pretest

Test Statistics^a

| Post test - Pre test | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Z | -2.182 ^b |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .029 |

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

These following tables indicate that there is a median difference between pairs of observations in experimental class since the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000 < 0.05 (H₀ is rejected). In addition, the mean score of posttest is higher than that of pre-test (6.73 > 5.75), which is inferred that the pronunciation of the experiment class has been better after

learning with Moodle activities.

Similarly, these tables above show that there is a median difference between pairs of observations in control class because the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.029 < 0.05 (Ho is rejected). Besides, the mean score of pre-test is lower than that of post-test (5.53 < 5.94), which is inferred that the pronunciation of the control class has improved after learning pronunciation in traditional approach.

Table 4

Mann-Whitney U test to compare the posttest scores of the experimental class and the control class

| | | Ranks | | | |
|----------|------------|-------|----|-----------|--------------|
| | | Class | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| Posttest | Experiment | | 32 | 37.83 | 1210.50 |
| | Control | | 30 | 24.75 | 742.50 |
| | Total | | 62 | | |

| Test Statistics ^a | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| | Posttest |
| Mann-Whitney U | 277.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | 742.500 |
| Z | -2.929 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .003 |

a. Grouping Variable: Class

To prove that there is a discrepancy between the post test scores of the experimental class and the control class, the Mann-Whitney U test is used as in the following table. It is obviously displayed that the null hypothesis is rejected because the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.003 < 0.05, or there is a difference in the mean rank of post-test scores between 2 classes. However, to know how much progress the experimental class

has made in pronunciation in comparison with the control class, the Cohen's d and the effect-size correlation r should be calculated.

Table 5

The Cohen's d and the effect-size correlation r : how much progress the experimental class has made in pronunciation in comparison with the control class.

| Lop | | | | |
|------------|------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Experiment | | | Control | |
| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation |
| Posttest | 6.73 | .76 | 5.94 | .96 |

$$\text{Cohen's } d = M_1 - M_2 / \sigma_{\text{pooled}}$$

$$\text{where } \sigma_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{[(\sigma_1^2 + \sigma_2^2) / 2]}$$

$$r_{Y\lambda} = d / \sqrt{(d^2 + 4)}$$

As a result, the Cohen's d is 0.9124567795790585 and the effect-size r is 0.4150714806192597. If these numbers are looked up in the Cohen's Standard table, it can be pointed out that an Effect size of 0.4 indicates that the mean of the experiment group is at the 66th percentile of the control group, nearly at medium level, or the experimental mean score is 66 % higher than the control mean score.

Table 6*The Cohen's Standard table**(adapted from <https://www.uccs.edu/lbecker/effect-size>)*

| Cohen's Standard | Effect Size | Percentile Standing | Percent of Nonoverlap |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| | 2 | 97.7 | 81.10% |
| | 1.9 | 97.1 | 79.40% |
| | 1.8 | 96.4 | 77.40% |
| | 1.7 | 95.5 | 75.40% |
| | 1.6 | 94.5 | 73.10% |
| | 1.5 | 93.3 | 70.70% |
| | 1.4 | 91.9 | 68.10% |
| | 1.3 | 90 | 65.30% |
| | 1.2 | 88 | 62.20% |
| | 1.1 | 86 | 58.90% |
| | 1 | 84 | 55.40% |
| | 0.9 | 82 | 51.60% |
| LARGE | 0.8 | 79 | 47.40% |
| | 0.7 | 76 | 43.00% |
| | 0.6 | 73 | 38.20% |
| MEDIUM | 0.5 | 69 | 33.00% |
| | 0.4 | 66 | 27.40% |
| | 0.3 | 62 | 21.30% |
| SMALL | 0.2 | 58 | 14.70% |
| | 0.1 | 54 | 7.70% |
| | 0 | 50 | 0% |

Therefore, it is concluded that Moodle-based activities have a nearly medium impact on improving freshmen' pronunciation. The experimental class has improved their pronunciation and is 66 % better than the control class.

The results from Questionnaire

The table indicates that whether there were any progress students could make after the course with Moodle, from the students' viewpoints. What stood out in the table was most of participants agreed and strongly agreed with the given statements. Surprising, only a minority of respondents disagreed, and no ratings was for strongly disagree.

Table 7*Pronunciation improvement after the Moodle course*

| Statements | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Generally, my pronunciation was improved. | 32.50% | 62.50% | 5.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| 2. I made fewer mistakes in pronunciation. | 50.00% | 47.50% | 0.00% | 2.50% | 0.00% |
| 3. I could realize my own pronunciation mistakes. | 22.50% | 75.00% | 0.00% | 2.50% | 0.00% |
| 4. I could pronounce English consonants. | 45.00% | 55.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| 5. I felt easier to speak English after this course. | 50.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| 6. I felt easier to listen to English after this course. | 52.50% | 45.00% | 0.00% | 2.50% | 0.00% |

In response to Statement 1, most of those surveyed indicated that their pronunciation was improved (62.5 % agree and 32.5 % strongly agree). When the participants were asked if they could make fewer mistakes in pronunciation, half of them strongly agreed (50%) and nearly the same agree (47.5%). More than two-thirds of the participants (75%) agreed that they could realize their own pronunciation mistakes, 25% strongly agreed and only 2.5% disagreed. There was a similar rate, almost participants agreed and strongly agreed that they felt easier to speak English and listen to English after the course (more than 50% for agree and nearly 50% for strongly agree). In contrast, only 2.5% participants disagreed with statement 2,3, 6 while there was definitely 0 % percentage of strongly disagree for all statements. Overall, these results indicated that taking part in Moodle activities could help students better their English pronunciation.

The data from open-ended questions also reveal interesting facts.

Students' experience when attending Moodle -based activities

First, the students felt interested while learning pronunciation on Moodle system. With the support of Moodle activities, students find pronunciation learning more effective, helpful and satisfactory. They are now no longer under the pressure of face-to-face with classmates and teachers. It also gave them more confidence and increased comfort in pronouncing words. In the students' opinion, Moodle forum helps students to recognize their mistake by receiving peer feedback and teacher feedback. As a result, it brings awesome benefits: improve teamwork skills, gain the efficient pronunciation modification, gain more knowledge of IPA phonetics. Most importantly, students' confidence on pronouncing words or on their gradual improvement increase day by day.

Benefits of Moodle-based activities in learning pronunciation

When it comes to the benefits, the recording activities help students be more confident as well as more fluent and more well-prepared. As the activities increase the excitement of students, that's why it motivates students in searching for more phonetics knowledge which is related to the target sounds. In general, it enhances students' self-study.

In fact, thanks to self-correction, peer-correction, teacher correction, IPA guidance materials and links, the Moodle activities help a lot to improve pronunciation competence (uploaded on Moodle space). Students not only realized how to pronounce sounds appropriately, but they also knew about their mistakes in pronunciation by looking back at comments in forum.

Students' pronunciation improvements after applying Moodle course

There are some achievements the students gained after 12 weeks. First, they are becoming more confident and pronounce fluently difficult sounds. Secondly, Moodle forums together with feedbacks allow them to correct their own pronunciation's mistakes. Students can pronounce clearer and distinguish minimal pairs better. Thirdly, students can speak English sentences more fluently with less anxiety. Next, they have more time for preparation and improve groupwork skill. Last but not least, students have better performance of reading a text because of rehearsing many times before submitting the final version of their recordings.

The results from Interview

During the last week of the class, the researcher interviewed six volunteer students to obtain in-depth feedback on the Moodle-based class. The interview questions followed by the students' responses are listed as follows.

1. *Do you think that your English pronunciation was generally improved by doing Moodle-based pronunciation activities? If YES, give some specific improvement examples.*

All 6 participants admitted that their pronunciation was improve, from slightly to considerably. Students were more confident because they can pronounce words correctly, including word endings or can make themselves understood by their peers or the teacher. It is no longer too difficult for them to differentiate minimal pairs, or they have more interest in acquiring new knowledge of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) or more motivation in learning pronunciation. Here are the statements from three students:

"I have never learnt any pronunciation classes before. I had no ideas about pronunciation. For this class, I was very excited and found it very useful. I know how to correct my pronunciation and how to control as well as pronounce a word properly. My pronunciation is getting significantly better now. As a result, my English learning is becoming easier and more motivating. For instance, I can get better control over pronouncing sounds at the ends of words. I can figure out how to say the new word correctly by myself after looking it up in the dictionary." (S4-F)

"My pronunciation was improved remarkably thanks to learning in class and practicing at home through the pronunciation activities online. I can distinguish the similar sounds in minimal pairs, such as /s/ and /ʃ/ in *sip* and *ship*.(S5-F)

Combining what the teacher explained in class and listening to audio files and peers' recording, I could recognize and correct my own pronunciation mistakes. Therefore, my pronunciation was improved to some extent. (S6 - M)"

2. *What are your difficulties in improving your pronunciation through Moodle system?*

Four students had no difficulties learning pronunciation with

Moodle. In contrast, one student pointed out some problems with log-in or upload activities while the other students complained about limited time for pronunciation practice due to the hectic school schedule. Here are two opinions from the interviewees:

“At first, we had some problems with getting used to this course, such as: how to log into the course or upload my recordings to the forum. However, after 1 or 2 weeks, everyone became accustomed to it.” (S1 – M)

“I didn’t have much time for practicing online after class due to my hectic school schedule, that’s why my pronunciation was improved as much as I expected.” (S6 – M)

3. *What do you suggest that the teacher improve upon Moodle course?*

Overall, all interviewees hoped more games to be included in pronunciation course, smaller study groups, more focus on word stress, sentence stress and word endings as well as further practice. Here are four typical answers:

“I would like to carry on with this type of learning, so my pronunciation can be improved more in word stress, sentence stress and word endings. I prefer working with smaller groups in class in order to facilitate my pronunciation practice in class.” (S3-F)

“I appreciate this type of learning a lot and I hope to continue this class for the next course. I had no further suggestions.” (S4-F)

“In my opinion, I want to have more listening exercises and more time in class to practice and improve my pronunciation as well as my speaking.” (S5-F)

“I hope that we will have more games to learn the new pronunciation lessons in class.” (S6 – M)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Pre – post tests

Based on the results from the pre – post test analysis, the data reveal that both groups have improved after 12 weeks of English learning. However, comparing the mean scores of the pronunciation pre-test and

post-test, the control group and experimental group have made progress in the different degree although they were at the same level of pronunciation before the course. The experimental class has improved their pronunciation and is 66 % better than the control class.

Questionnaire

The result of the questionnaire as presented in Table 7 in term of pronunciation enhancement indicated that the students in the experimental class improved their pronunciation in general, which is consistent with the results of the pronunciation tests. The results demonstrated that the majority of the participants thought that they made less pronunciation mistakes and became more confident in pronouncing words clearly and correctly. Additionally, they generally agreed that their listening and speaking in class were getting better once their pronunciation was improved.

Students' interview

Students' self-reflection of their enhancement of their pronunciation

According to the results of qualitative data above, all six students expressed positive feedback on their self-improvement after taking the blended learning using Moodle for pronunciation, which is consistent with the result of the quantitative data obtained from the pronunciation tests. It could help them to better pronunciation and speaking that led to communication skill improvement. Firstly, they were knowledgeable of pronunciation terms, final sound, phonetic transcripts, and difficult sounds. Then the pronunciation was clearer, become more correct and fluent. Noticeably, one of the interviewee pointed out that she could be self-aware enough to realize her incorrect words that she has made for a long time and known how to correct all. Interestingly, some interviewees felt more self-confident to practice online compared with offline class where they were often shy and afraid of making mistakes. To sum up, the majority of participants agreed on the enhancement of their pronunciation with Moodle system.

These findings reconfirm Marcais (2002), as cited in Suppasetsee and Dennis (2010) and Boškovic, Gajic, & Tomic (2014) that speaking and pronunciation should be learnt by integrating “real” and “useful” activities. In this case, Moodle with its interactive activities can meet this demand, or motivate students in pronunciation classes. Moreover, this result consolidates Wilson (2008) about using Moodle to boost students' pronunciation and enjoyment or to reinforce the interaction between teacher and students or among students. Moreover, the findings of this

study contribute significantly to Moodle' worthiness in pronunciation improvement in Vietnam context, which has not been exploited so far. However, because the sample in this study is quite small (n=62), the findings needs reconfirming by other future researches with a bigger sample.

The Moodle application for the pronunciation course has the advantage of offering students a range of opportunities and ways to improve their pronunciation which was not focused much in class. The participants were motivated in learning English when they figured out how to say a new word properly in term of vowels, consonants and final sounds. On the other hand, before implementing this type of blended learning for EFL students, the following issues should be considered:

1. The participants need more time to get used to the online class like joining the forum, uploading the recording files and giving comments on their peers' recording.
2. Instructors should be considered about the proper timing for implementing the blended learning model to their English classes. Therefore, they can balance and optimise course instruction and class activities.

There are some limitations that students and the lecturer have to face with while teaching and learning pronunciation by using Moodle. Technology problem is the first issue, relating logging-in, uploading, recording, using forum, etc. When students could not experience the system smoothly, they became irritated and impatient. It leads to the second challenge: time consuming for teacher consultancy and students' familiarity with the system. Besides, appropriate feedback for students also needs taking into consideration because there were too many students' recordings for the teacher to give feedback and correction to all, which may lead to wrong peer correction cases. Last but not least, the preparation for Moodle activities is also a time-consuming process.

To deal with those challenges, teachers should take time for thorough Moodle training for students before applying the system into the pronunciation course. Good preparation from the scratch reduces time loss. Secondly, teachers should select some recordings with typical mistakes in pronunciation and demonstrate the right rules in class so that students will have a standard model to follow. Finally, preparation or designing for Moodle activities should be shared among teachers with the same interests. By this way, Moodle-based activities will be diverse, innovative and beneficial for learners. The teacher's burden is lessened

as well as their time is saved.

CONCLUSION

Within blended learning where there is a thoughtful combination between the best components of face-to-face instruction and online learning, it has been asserted that the objectives, content, and organization of this Moodle teaching/learning course design contribute to a certain degree in satisfying learners' learning needs. This research that sought to determine the freshmen students' enhancement in Moodle environment provides strong evidence certifying that blended learning pronunciation course with Moodle contributes in enhancing their pronunciation. Since this new learning environment empowered university students with more learning autonomy and freedom, more and more blended learning courses where the learning conditions characterizing face-to-face learning and e-learning are effectively combined to satisfy learners' needs is becoming a necessity. Setting the ground for this innovative learning environment will meet the aspiration and exigencies of the 21st generation university students.

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